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Tehran Embassy-Espionage Accuser

Subic Wore Fatigues in High School And Prowled Town With Policemen

By Blaine Harden

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Army Staff Sgt. Joseph Subic Jr., the American hostage who claimed on Iranian television Wednesday night that Americans at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran were engaged in espionage, grew up in Bowling Green, Ohio, where he is remembered as a "super patriot" with an almost fanatical devotion to law and order.

Those who knew him at Bowling Green High School say Subic frequently came to school wearing Army fatigues and paratrooper boots. He wore his hair in a flattop, spent much of his time riding around in police squad cars and was known somewhat suspiciously by fellow students as "GI Joe."

"In the students' eyes he was seen as a 'narc' [narcotics agent] because of all the time he spent with the police," said school principal Neal Allen. "Joe was very patriotic. I wouldn't expect him to say anything negative about his country."

On the Iranian television show, Subic, 23, who dropped out of high school in 1974 in his junior year, said that the U.S. government was attempting to complete the installation of electronic spying equipment when the embassy was seized Nov. 4.

Subic, who was one of four hostages to read Christmas Day statements for Iranian television cameras and who has written to many American newspapers, also denounced deposed shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and criticized President Carter for allegedly putting the shah's welfare above that of the hostages.

Subic's parents, who live in suburban Detroit, would not comment yesterday on their son's latest statements.

The State Department repudiated them as "hardly credible," considering the circumstances Subic and the other hostages are in.

"I think that Joe was a very, very loyal American," said F. Gus Skibbie, a friend of Subic and a former mayor of Bowling Green. In Subic's statements, he said, "There is the possibility of extenuating circumstances of which no one this side of the hostage compound is aware of."

Skibbie, who frequently exchanged letters with Subic until the soldier was sent to Iran last June as a member of the embassy's defense attache's staff, said he had "never seen a young man with such devotion to police work."

"During my period as mayor, Joe came to me and expressed a great interest in the police. I made arrangements for him to go on police calls, such as barking-dog problems. He performed in a most admirable fashion. Frankly, I was surprised that he joined the military because he seemed suited for the police."

In his high school of 900 classmates, Subic was an average student and a "loner," according to his former principal. He didn't participate in athletics, nor did he belong to any school clubs. He did, however, involve the Explorer Scouts in assisting police in crowd control.

"He wasn't a boy in the 'in' group in school," said Earl A. Shaffer, a chemistry teacher. "He was a quiet, retiring boy who was teased a lot for his military appearance and his haircut."

Shaffer said that Subic once shocked teachers and students by bringing a rifle to school for a demonstration in English class. "He gave some of the students quite a start when he walked down the hall with his rifle and his fatigues," Shaffer said.

Shaffer also said that in 1974, when many students were wearing their hair long and espousing antiwar philosophies, Subic stood out because of his professed love of his country.

"He was sort of a superpatriot, very conservative and reactionary about things. He seemed to glorify the idea of force, wars and so on," said Shaffer.

Subic's father, Joseph Sr., a retired Army lieutenant colonel, recently sold his wine shop in Bowling Green and moved with his wife, Helen, to Redford Township, Mich., where he sells real estate, according to friends in Bowling Green.

The family has refused to talk to reporters since their son was taken hostage.